

## **Briefing Sheet for Parish & Town Councils June 2025**

**Housing Pressures:** At the last Somerset Council meeting, a Conservative motion sought to highlight the county's growing housing pressures and called for Government recognition of the cumulative impact of issues such as nutrient neutrality delays, inward migration, rise in second homes, and increased demand from large infrastructure projects like Hinkley Point C. The motion proposed writing to the Secretary of State to outline Somerset's unique housing pressures and seek assurances that national schemes will not reduce housing provision for local people; requesting additional investment for housing; and affirming Somerset's commitment to prioritising Somerset residents for housing where legally and practically possible. The motion was debated at length but was ultimately defeated at the meeting.

**£101million Budget Gap:** Somerset Council must find £101million in savings for the next financial year to balance its budget. This target forms part of the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy and reflects the scale of the financial challenge facing the authority. A key part of the response is a council-wide transformation programme aimed at modernising services and reducing costs. The full business case for this programme is due to come to the Executive shortly and is expected to set out how savings will be achieved across different workstreams. External auditors have stressed the need for urgent, detailed plans to avoid further instability.

**New Finance Officer:** Somerset Council has appointed its third Interim Chief Finance Officer (CFO) in under a year. The Council had originally planned to begin the recruitment process for a permanent CFO in October 2024, but the advert was not issued until January 2025—making it unlikely the role could be filled before the 2025/26 financial year. Having failed to appoint a suitable permanent CFO, a further interim has been appointed at a cost of £270,000 for nine months—£120,000 above the total annual budget allocated for the post. This additional cost is having to be met through the capitalisation directive.

**Pay & Grading Review:** Somerset Council will spend up to £3 million on external consultants to carry out a pay and grading review for staff, following the creation of the unitary authority in 2023. The review is intended to address inherited inconsistencies in pay structures and recruitment difficulties across certain roles. The process is expected to take nearly two years, concluding by April 2027, and may result in changes to staff pay levels.

**Safe Vape Disposal:** Somerset Council and its waste contractor, SUEZ, are urging residents to dispose of used vapes separately due to rising safety concerns. Improper disposal—such as placing vapes in general waste or with other recyclables—can lead to fires when compacted in collection vehicles. To safely recycle both reusable and non-reusable vapes the council now asks residents to keep them separate by putting them into a small, clear tied bag, such as a sandwich bag, and leave it on top of one of the recycling boxes.

**Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment Consultation 2025:** Somerset Council has launched a public consultation on its draft Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA), which evaluates the current and future provision of pharmaceutical services across the county. The consultation closes on Monday 16 June, 2025.

You can view and respond to active consultations at <https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/>